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***Konfuzius in Oranienbaum. Chinoise Darstellungen zum Leben des Meisters und ihr kulturhistorischer Hintergrund*, von Dorothee SCHAAB-HANKE.** VII + 106 pages with many illustrations. Reihe Phönixfeder, 53. Gossenberg: Ostasien, 2020. ISBN 978-3-946114-67-3

Oranienbaum is a small place (today a town of 3,000 inhabitants) close to Dessau in the former principality of Anhalt (today: state of Sachsen-Anhalt). Its original name was Nischwitz but in honour of Princess Henriette Catharina von Oranien-Nassau, wife of Prince Johann Georg II. von Anhalt-Dessau, it was renamed in 1673. 1683 the Dutch architect Cornelis Ryckwaert began work on the construction of a baroque castle and garden.⁷ Prince Leopold III. Friedrich Franz (1740–1817) had the garden redesigned in Anglo-Chinese style, according to recommendations by Friedrich Wilhelm von Erdmannsdorff (1736–1800), and a Chinese (Tea) House and a Pagoda built after “authentic” plans published by William Chambers (1723–1796). Prince Charles de Ligne (1735–1796) paid a visit to the garden in 1795 and commented: “I was also at Oranienbaum whose old French style maintains tristesse and humidity; what the Prince, a favourite of the God of Taste and dear to my heart, already began to brighten on the right side by Chinese structures which are here at their proper place. The Prince proceeds in a way as if he spent all his life in Peking.” There are Chinese style murals in the Chinese House and on the second floor of the castle as well. Previous descriptions already assumed that they might feature scenes from the life of Confucius but only the present author was able to identify the

7 See the entry in Eleanor von Erdberg: *Chinese influence on European garden structures*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard 1936, 170–171.

sources – namely a series of copper prints by Isidore-Stanislas Helman (1743–1809) who published *Abrégé historique des principaux traits de la vie de Confucius*. Paris 1788. This goes back to a famous woodcut work *Shengjitu* 聖蹟圖 (Pictures of the life of the Saint, i.e. Confucius), by Zhang Kai 張楷 (1398–1460); the original work is not preserved but in the course of centuries it apparently developed from a sober biography into a hagiography. A version containing 105 pictures (1874) seems to be closely related to the Oranienbaum designs as it contains all 23 Helman etchings of which 12 were chosen for the murals. The portrait of Confucius which is also found in Oranienbaum was taken from a different source, namely the *Queli zhi* 闕里誌 by Chen Gao 陳鎬 (?–1511), a monograph on Confucius' home area. The Helman etchings were not directly inspired by the *Shengjitu* but from watercolours prepared by a Chinese painter and forwarded by the Jesuit China missionary Father Jean-Joseph Amiot (1718–1793) who also provided explanations and a fully fledged biography of Confucius from Chinese sources.⁸ Helman's descriptions of his etchings rely on Amiot's but also differ from them. The arrangement of the murals does not follow a chronological order which might have been difficult as they are distributed over two different buildings and also had to be customised to the available wall spaces. There is at least one coloured copy of Helman's etchings known but the colours do not match the murals. So one has to assume that details of the representations had to be decided on by the painter or the Prince. The question remains – why was the life of Confucius chosen for the purpose of decorating castle and Chinese House? Well, by 1795 the Sinomania of previous times was over, but Confucius was still a symbol for Chinese wisdom and the enlightened rule over country; on the other hand, Prince Leopold III. was impressed by the teachings of the physiocrats and the concern for agriculture in China where the emperor at the beginning of his reign performed the ploughing ceremony and was several times painted in the role of the Divine Husbandman (Shennong). This was much to the liking of the Prince who strove to improve the agriculture of his principality and thus the living conditions of his subjects. In line with this was the fact that the Chinese House featured several plates from the Illustrations of Tilling and Weaving, *Gengzhitu* 耕織圖 of which only one survives.

This little book is a splendid model of sinological expertise which is combined with the taste of an experienced bibliophile publisher. All illustrations are in colour

8 Published as vol. 12 of *Mémoires concernant l'histoire, les sciences, les arts, les mœurs, les usages &c. des Chinois*. Paris: Nyon 1786. It is illustrated by 18 of the Helman etchings, which do not cover all the Oranienbaum murals.

(when possible); there are maps which show the exact positions of the murals in the buildings. The woodcuts from the Shengjitu, which correspond to the murals, are given in facsimile with the texts and corresponding translations. The same holds true for the respective Helman etchings and their explanations. They are followed by reproductions of all Oranienbaum murals. A list of the sources of the illustrations, notes and a bibliography conclude the book which can be warmly recommended to historians, art historians, sinologists (yes, Chinese characters are given wherever useful), students who want an example of a good methodological approach, and to book-lovers, of course, who enjoy a well-designed publication.

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